Justice in Islam and Christianity: A Comparative Study

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Abstract

One of the most fundamental subjects relating to humankind's social life is justice. From the early days of human civilization, this topic has been intertwined with the most basic philosophical and sociological thoughts developed by the human mind. The great intellectuals of human history-whose contributions in the field of knowledge should truly be viewed as humankind's collective heritage, not merely tied to the pride of a particular region or nationality-have all sought to address this topic in some way-in view, of course, of their peculiar social, ethical, philosophical, and political considerations-in an attempt to offer a precise definition of it and an accurate description of its role in the general arena of the human being's social life. Divine and monotheistic religions have also been champions of justice in human societies. The Qur'an-as the final heavenly book revealed to God's final prophet-enumerates three objectives in Surah Jum'ah for which God appointed His prophets: to purify the human being's soul from vice, to teach him God's decrees and signs, and to edify him with knowledge and wisdom so as to enable him to uphold social justice. This demonstrates clearly that, in their religious endeavors, all the prophets pursued the same end, for the above-cited Surah does not restrict these objectives to Prophet Muhammad's ministry; they are put forth as the objectives of all previous prophets as well.

In this light, the comparative study of the principles that the monotheistic and Abrahamic faiths-particularly the two great faiths of Islam and Christianity-share in common or at least come very close to sharing is an especially important interdisciplinary field of study. In this article, I attempt to examine, in summary fashion of course, the tenets Islam and Christianity posit with regard to the concept of justice. (I should note in advance that my study of the Christian doctrine rests mainly on the thought and works of Saint Augustine.) This article should be viewed as a preliminary work, an introduction to a more extensive study on the principles these two faiths define regarding justice and, more particularly, social justice.

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Introduction

The subject of the present comparative study is the concept of justice in view of, on the one hand, Islamic doctrine and, on the other hand, Christian doctrine as expressed by the prominent Christian thinker, Saint Augustine. Justice is one of the important topics for debate in the various fields of human knowledge; it holds a prominent position among the tenets of the monotheistic faiths. The topic of justice is debated with reference to such contexts as society, politics, law, economy, culture, theology, ethics, and philosophy. Discussion centers around the relevant definition and instances of justice in each context.

The topic of justice takes on special importance in relation to society. As such, justice holds a unique place in fields of politics and sociology. That Plato's *Republic* begins with a discussion on justice is a clear testament to this fact. Plato first elucidates the different interpretations of justice that existed in his time and then offers the one he deems correct (Plato, 2003, pp.8-46). Aristotle, too, takes on the subject of justice in his *Nicomachean Ethics* (Aristotle, 1998, pp.106-125). The topic of justice and the just human being is a central theme in the religious texts of Islam as well. The Qur'an, Islam's heavenly book, offers important instructions regarding justice.

The Definition of Justice

To begin this comparative study, it is necessary that we first consider the literal meaning of *'adl*-the word for justice in Arabic. One definition describes *'adl* in terms of equality. In this sense, it is said to be synonymous with such words as *mithl* (an object that resembles and is similar to another object) and *fidyah* (ransom), both of which are instances of the first definition (Qurayshī, 1364, p.301).

In its definition of *'adl*, *Aqrab al-mawārid* sates, "*'adala fulānan ya'nī wāzanahū ... 'adala qāżī 'adlan ya'nī anṣafa*."[1] It further

explains that *'adl* is used both as a verbal noun and a substantive and that it is also occasionally used in the sense of inclining toward a certain direction (Shartūnī Lubnānī, 1416, p.493). *'Adl* appears in a number of verses of the Qur'an in this sense.

Some scholar are of the opinion that *'idl* and *'adl* (both from the same lexical root) share the same core meaning but are different in that the former refers to something that is similar to something else while they both share the same nature, whereas *'adl* is the substitute for something even if it does not share the same nature. This definition is substantiated by verse 95, Sūrah Mā'idah: "*aw 'adlu dhālika Şīāman*" ("or the *equivalent* thereof in fasting"). Rāghib Işfahānī remarks that *'idl* is used of things that are objects of one of the bodily senses- objects that can be weighed or counted- whereas *'adl* refers to objects that are grasped by the mind (Rāghib Işfahānī, 1392 AH, p.336).

Furthermore, verse 3, Sūrah Nisā', reads, "*wa in khiftum an lā* ta'dilū *fa wāhidah*" ("but if you fear that you cannot be just then [take] only one wife"). In contrast, verse 129 of the same sūrah reads, "*wa lan tastaţī'ū an* ta'dilū *bayn al-nisā' wa law haraştum*" ("but you can never be just in relation to [multiple] wives, even if you be eager [to treat them all with justice]"). Although the two verses appear to contradict one another, it is reported that the Imāms[2] interpreted justice in the latter verse as indicating equality in love: Regardless of how just one may be, one cannot truly cherish the same degree of love for every wife, for the feeling of love is not a volitional act subject to human will (Qurayshī, 1364, p.301).

Another instance where the word *'adl* occurs in the Qur'an is verse 48, Sūrah Baqarah, which deals with the punishment in the hereafter that will be inflicted on the sinners: "*wa lā yuqbalu minhā shafā'ah wa lā yu'khadh minhā* 'adl" ("no intercession shall be accepted from [a soul] nor shall any ransom be received"). *'Adl* in this verse denotes

ransom, and so the verse means that the sinner cannot atone for his wrongs by paying a ransom to free his soul from punishment.

After considering the interpretation of verses 106-109 of Sūrah Mā'idah, 'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī devotes a chapter to the topic of justice from the viewpoint of the Qur'an under the title "kalām fī al-'idālah" ("A Word on Justice"). He defines justice as moderation and the middle ground between two extremes. He writes,

Indeed there is for justice- which is moderation and adhering to the middle ground between a high point and a low point, between two extremes- true value and great significance in the context of human society. Justice is the substantial element on which the order and harmony of a society hinge (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 1394 AH, p.219)

'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī begins the discussion by stressing the great significance that observing justice and avoiding the extremes has for human society. He then goes on to argue for the necessity of there being individuals within every society that are responsible for upholding justice.

An important point he makes in this discussion is the distinction he draws between justice in the context of jurisprudence and that in the context of ethics. Justice in the context of jurisprudence consists merely in refraining from sin and as such is a practical criterion whose assessment and evaluation rests with the public. Justice in the context of ethics, on the other hand, is a peculiar disposition that is so firmly established in the soul that it precludes one from following any inclination leading to an inappropriate act. In the context of jurisprudence, justice describes an outward and practical quality that is gauged and verified by the general public. Furthermore, justice in this context is mainly a negative concept, indicating the state of abstaining from those deeds that are deemed sinful by religious decree (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 1394 AH, p.220).

The Master of the Faithful defines *'adl* or justice by comparing it to its opposite- *zulm*. *Úulm* or injustice is in turn defined as "the failure to place a thing in its appropriate position" (Sayyid Ražī, 1368, p.440). According to this definition, then, justice requires that everything should be placed in its appropriate position. We arrive at this definition by negating that of its opposite, which is *zulm* or injustice. The above-mentioned meaning of *zulm* is corroborated by Qur'anic usage: verse 33 of Sūrah Kahf reads, "*kiltā al-jannatayn Átat ukulahā wa lam* tazlim *minhu shay'ā*" ("Each of the two gardens yielded its fruit and *withheld* naught thereof"). In his commentary on verse 35, Sūrah Baqarah, 'Allāmah Ţabrisī states, "The core meaning of *zulm* is the failure to sufficiently fulfill a right … and it has been suggested that it means to place a thing where it does not belong" (Ţabrisī, 1403 AH, p.84). *Al-Şihāh* and *al-Qāmūs* offer this definition: "*Úulm* is to place something where it does not belong." This is a widely applicable definition, and it especially suits the fields of politics and sociology (Jawharī, 1974, p.67).

Enumerating the various types of justice in his *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle refers to a certain type of justice he terms "distributive justice." He defines distributive justice as the allocation of social positions to men based on their merit and worth so that every person finds the position that best befits him (Aristotle, 1998, p.109). The human intellect is capable of evaluating people's potentials and thereby determining whether a person's merit, capabilities, and expertise qualify him for occupying a certain position or not.

Rāghib Işfahānī agrees with this definition in his *Mufradāt*: "Literally, *zulm* is to place a thing where it does not belong, thus transgressing the limits of truth" (Rāghib Işfahānī, 1392 AH, p.336). A number of scholars have attempted to provide a clearer explanation of this concept in view of the verses of the Qur'an. One particular verse that is of interest in this relation is verse 281, Sūrah Baqarah:

"[On the Day of Judgment] every soul shall be recompensed fully for what it earned; they will not be wronged." That is, God bestows to every person what is his due and nothing else.

This topic has been taken up at greater length by Qur'anic exegetes. In so doing, they have endeavored to move beyond lexical discussions, examining the topic of justice in reference to such fields as ethics, theology, sociology, and politics. Their discussions do not, of course, disregard the literal and lexical connections.

It is reported that the Master of the Faithful[3] was asked whether justice was superior or generosity? His answer was justice. Justice, as explained by the Imām, is a comprehensive policy whose result is that every person receives what is his due on an equal basis. Generosity, however, is a limited policy whose fruits benefit only a few (Sayyid Rażī, 1368, p.440).

Justice in the Philosophy of Politics and the Science of Ethics

Khājah Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī, the renowned Muslim philosopher, entitles a chapter of his *Akhlāq nāṣirī* "The Superiority of Justice to the Other Virtues." In this chapter he considers the definition of justice and its varying degrees. He starts this chapter by giving his definition of justice, in which he equates it with the concepts of equality and moderation. Khwaājah Naṣīr believes that justice is the most superior human virtue. As with Plato, he identifies two aspects for justice: the individual, spiritual aspect and the social aspect (Ṭūsī, 1373).

Plato, in the *Republic*, criticizes the definitions of justice proffered by others and offers his own. He recognizes two aspects for justice- the individual and the social. Plato maintains that the human soul incorporates three main faculties: (1) the intellective faculty, whose function is to lead the other faculties and thereby guide the human being; (2) the faculty of wrath, whose function is to guard the body against any possible danger, and if it were not for this faculty, the

human being would have been incapable of escaping the dangers that threaten his existence; (3) the faculty of libido, whose function is to take care of the body's essential needs. Plato considers the individual aspect of justice in reference to these three faculties of the soul. This point of view was later taken up for study and critique by such great Islamic philosophers and scholars of Islamic ethics as Fārābī, Ibn Miskawayh, Khājah Naşīr al-Dīn Ţūsī, and Abū al-Hasan ʿĀmirī, among others (ʿĀmirī, 1413 AH, p.157).

Plato maintains that justice obtains in the human being when these three faculties are in a state of balance. If either of the faculties of wrath or libido takes control of the soul, one can no longer be a just and righteous individual, for his actions would tend to one extreme or another (Plato, 2003, 8-24). Interestingly, the same view is expressed by the Master of the Faithful: "The ignorant man oscillates invariably between the two extremes" (Majlisī, 1386 AH, p.217). That is because the ignorant man fails to realize the value of the faculties God has endowed him with and so he is absolutely oblivious as to how he must employ them. He is either doing too much or too little, either going too fast or too slow:

The wayfarer is not he who now goes fast and now tires;

The wayfarer is he who goes slowly yet continuously.

Khājah Naşīr borrows this view from Plato, articulating it in a lucid and philosophical manner in his *Akhlāq nāşirī*. He explains that justice in its individual aspect results when the faculties of the soul have been restrained so that the intellect governs wrath and libido and prevents them from taking over, thereby bringing equilibrium to the soul and its faculties. Once this equilibrium is achieved, justice takes root in one's existence and becomes the dominant disposition in one's character.[4] Khājah Naşīr goes on to elaborate that when the intellect triumphs over wrath and libido, thus achieving a state of equilibrium, the individual treats his closer relations along with the other individuals in the society

and even the other creatures with fairness and equity. One who has reached this state is God's best friend and the best of His creatures, just as the unjust person is the most hideous of his creatures.

Khājah then continues his discussion on justice by distinguishing three arenas in which it can be applied: justice in transactions and dealings, justice in property, and justice in disciplining and correction (Ṭūsī, 1373, p.108). In speaking of justice in transactions, Khājah refers to the role that gold coins and other currencies play in bringing and maintaining justice. In this relation, he points to three authorities whose dictates must be observed.

The first is the *Sharī'ah* or Islamic canon- "the greatest divine authority," which must be observed in the social sphere. Justice requires that the law that God has decreed for His creatures should be implemented. The second authority Khājah points to is the ruler, provided he implements the Sharī'ah in the society. The third authority consists of the regulations that have been established for the maintenance of justice in the society, such as money and the tools used for ascertaining the value of commodities in order to facilitate commerce. This last category includes any regulation or object that is employed in human society in order to uphold justice.

Appealing to Aristotle, Khājah Naṣīr observes that one may be unjust in respect to each of these three authorities. The "greatest unjust person" is one who flouts "the greatest divine authority"; the "middle unjust person" is one who disobeys the ruler; and the "least unjust person" is one who disregards justice and equity in his social interactions, encroaches on the rights of others, stealing and usurping their properties (Ṭūsī, 1373, p.135).

The religious texts of Islam refer to justice in two contexts. In one context, justice is stipulated as a condition for certain matters. The justice intended in this context is that which consists of a mainly negative content and is put to practice by avoiding certain behaviors.

When the jurisprudents speak of justice as a qualification for the judge or the leader of the congregational prayer, they are employing the concept in this negative sense. The just person in this sense is one who does not commit any of the major sins, does not repeat a minor sin he has inadvertently committed, and does not engage in behaviors that are considered improper by the society- that is, those behaviors that the people in a society interpret as indicating a person's ignobility and impudence (Tūsī, undated, p.217). Justice in this context is largely a negative concept, and to realize it, one need only to possess *husn zāhir* (Shaykh Anṣārī, 1415 AH, p.49).[5]

In the second context, however, justice has a positive content: to practice equity and refrain from any form of injustice and oppression. It is in this sense that we attribute justice to God. This is the most elevated and truest form of justice, and should we succeed in incorporating it into our character, we will be blessed by the rays of divine light.[6]

God created the world in the manner necessitated by His wisdom, granting to every essence a complete form befitting its essential traits. In creating the world, He catered to the inherent capacity of every creature, and so, to borrow the words of Imām Muhammad al-Ghazālī, "There was naught possible that could have been more ingenious than what came to be": God created the most ingenious world possible. *Therefore, the religious texts of Islam apply justice in this sense to the social context and in describing the qualifications of the ruler as well.*

As mentioned above, Plato distinguished two aspects for justice, social and individual. This distinction was later espoused by Islamic philosophers, such as Fārābī and Khājah Naṣīr al-dīn. For Plato, justice in the social context constituted one of the four cardinal virtues- namely, wisdom, courage, moderation (self-control), and justice. In his discussion on the ideal state, Plato deems wisdom to be the necessary virtue of the philosopher-king; courage that of the generals and soldiers; and moderation that of the general public.

According to Plato, justice is the virtue that must be practiced by every class of society so that the people in each class would carry out their duties faithfully and avoid the desire to step outside the limits dictated by each class (Plato, 1998, p.4-432). Following the same general line of thought, Khājah Naṣīr agrees with Plato in counting justice as one of the four cardinal virtues in the social context.

It ought to be borne in mind that the religious texts of Islam contain an abundance of material on the topic of justice, a great part of which concerns the society and the positive aspect-that is, respecting the rights of others, executing one's obligations, and granting every creature what is its due. The Qur'an touches on this subject in numerous verses. One verse, for instance, reads, "That you harbor rancor for a people should not lead you to be unjust. Be just: That is nearer to God-wariness" (Qur'an 5:8). It is the positive sense of justice that is intended in this verse, the sense which is of great practical value in the spheres of society, politics, and governance (see Makārim Shīrāzī, 1396, p.302).

Religious Doctrine and Social Justice

Another important question relevant to the topic at hand is how to uphold justice in a way that people in positions of power would be compelled to acquiesce in and comply with the rule of justice. The religious texts of Islam-the Qur'an and the corpus of Tradition- are replete with references to the ephemeral nature of this world and the eternity of the hereafter. To truly believe that the days of residing in this world are numbered and that everyone is accountable in the hereafter for his conduct in this world can have a decisive effect in persuading one to uphold justice and deal equitably with fellow human beings.

Imām Muhammad al-Ghazālī, the world-renowned thinker of the Islamic world, articulates this point in his works. In *Ihyā' 'ulūm al-*

dīn, *Naṣīhah al-mulūk*, and *Kīmīā-yi saʿādat*, he considers the motives that can compel the kings and statesmen to uphold justice. What he writes in this regard is in its entirety derived from the teachings of the Qurʾan and the reports of Islamic Tradition.

In his *Naṣīhah al-mulūk* (*Advice to Kings*), he advises kings to shun oppression and injustice if only to avoid the evil consequences they may incur on its account. He writes,

> Know, O king, that this world is a temporary station, not a permanent abode. The human being in this world is in essence a traveler, whose first station is his mother's womb, and his last is his grave. His home and permanent abode is what follows the latter [the grave]. Every year that passes by is one stage in this journey and every month is like a relay station where the traveler stops to rest, and every week is like the time a traveler reaches a town and every day is like one league of the distance the traveler traverses, and every breath is like one step the traveler takes. With every breath, he is one step closer to the hereafter.

> This world is like a bridge. If a person passing over a bridge decides to remain on the bridge, building a comfortable lodging thereon and spending his time there and forgetting his home, he will surely be derided as a mindless fool. As such, the intelligent man is he who occupies himself in this temporary station exclusively with collecting provisions for the journey, availing himself of only the necessary minimum of this world, for that which he amasses more than what is necessary is but a lethal poison (Ghazālī Ṭūsī, 1361, p.53).

Ghazālī employs these descriptions in an effort to convince people, especially those in power, that this is a transient world, its bounties fleeting and its pleasures fraught with travail. After

elucidating such descriptions of the world, Ghazālī adds, "It is easy for the wise man to endure a few days in return for eternal felicity."

Due to the innumerable temptations that constantly besiege man and could possibly incite him to encroach on the rights of others, religious and moral texts emphasize the necessity of his being repeatedly reminded of the reality and truth of the world. This emphasis takes on an even greater urgency in respect to those who hold a position of power, so that they would realize that if they wield their power with justice and fairness, they shall receive rewards greater than that granted to the common folk, but otherwise, they shall incur God's wrath.

The belief that this world is a temporary station and that neglecting God is the root of all vice and transgression is not confined to Islam: Christianity -which is also a monotheistic faith- shares the same belief. We must bear in mind that the monotheistic faiths are very similar in the spirit of their respective doctrines and tenets. This is confirmed by the Qur'an: "Say, 'O People of the Book, come let us unite round a word that is common between us and you: That we worship not but God and ascribe not any partners to Him'" (Qur'an 3:64).

Another fundamental principle the monotheistic faiths share is the belief in the resurrection of the dead. Islam affirms the veracity of the message of the prophets of God who preceded Prophet Muhammad, describing him as the final prophet and the seal of prophet hood and thus bearing the most perfect religion. In this light, a brief examination of the Christian view on justice as it finds expression in the works of Saint Augustine -the great Christian thinker of the fourth and fifth centuries AD- can help in reaching a greater understanding of the shared principles of the monotheistic and Abrahamic faiths. Augustine is without doubt one of the most influential thinkers in the history of religion and political thought in the West. He is indeed a thinker whose thought has kept him alive to this day (McClelland, 2003, p.92).

The Concept of Justice in Christianity

Christianity- one of the major monotheistic and Abrahamic faiths- and Islam share a considerable number of common principles. Generally speaking, the monotheistic faiths are very similar in substance. They all call on humankind to believe in the one God and the Resurrection and to heed the instructions of God's prophets, which are in fact His instructions. Thus, in spite of the various interpretations the Bible has been subjected to and the numerous distortions it has undergone, a comparative study of the Bible and the Qur'an brings to light the very similar tenets pertaining to the application of morality, righteousness, fidelity, and justice to the various sphere of life that the two share.

The books of the Old Testament contain numerous moral passages relating to justice. One such instance is Chapter 23 of the Book of Exodus (*Kitāb Muqaddas: tarjimih tafsīrī*, 2002, p.78). The Gospel of Matthew also contains passages on justice. The teachings of Jesus to the Disciples include passages on the necessity of practicing justice and equity. In one striking phrase, Prophet Jesus asserts, "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after justice: for they shall have their fill" (Matthew 5:6). In Chapter 18 of Matthew, Jesus expresses, by relating a parable, the necessity of forgiving, being fair, and refraining from encroaching on the rights of others.

Saint Augustine, one of the most prominent of the Church Fathers and a very influential thinker and theologian, has treated of the topic of justice and its place in Christian doctrine. Saint Augustine (fl. 354-430 AD) was born in North Africa. In his youth, he disavowed Christianity for several years, turning to Manichaeism. But in a few years' time, he re-embraced Christianity and became a pupil of Saint Ambrose. He then moved back to his native country in North Africa, in time being promoted to the bishopric of Hippo (in present-day Algeria). He began writing *The City of God* in 413, completing it in

426. The onslaught of the Vandals began in 429 and extended into North Africa. Augustine died in the period Hippo was besieged by the Vandals (Jaspers, 1363, p.9).

The City of God is a classic of religio-political thought in the West, inspired in the main by Christian texts and doctrine. This work is more significant than Augustine's other such prominent works as *On the Trinity* and *Confessions*, and his commentaries on books of the Old Testament. For, in the *City of God* Augustine's fundamental worldview in relation to God, the world, and the human being's path to felicity finds lucid expression. Furthermore, the book can be read as a commentary of the Bible, which was less distorted at his time than it is now.[7] The great breadth of information the book contains on the historical, religious, literary, and political climate of the time in addition to the wide range of sources Augustine drew on in writing it gives us a thorough view of the Western civilization of the early fifth century AD. The influence this book has had on the development of the Christian civilization and especially Roman Catholicism is great. For successive centuries the book was the source of many discussions and debates among Christians (Durant, 1385, 94).

In choosing the title of the book, Augustine was inspired by certain verses of the Bible. The author claims that the content of the book stems from the Divine Will and so is not the product of fallible human judgment. Pointing to his source of inspiration, Augustine cites a number of Biblical verses, the following two among them:

> Glorious things are said of thee, O city of God (Psalms 86:3); Great is the Lord, and exceedingly to be praised in the city of our God, in His holy mountain. With the joy of the whole earth is Mount Sion founded, on the sides of the north, the city of the great king (Psalms 47:2-3).

Based on the verses of the Bible, Augustine maintains that the city of God is eternal- a city wherein the passionate, righteous, and just

people of God whose hearts are filled with His love can enter. But the people who are enamored of the life of this world, raise their false gods above the One God and Creator of this city, and engage in oppression and injustice are barred from entering therein. Those who are eager to enter the city of God have willingly submitted to Him and, instead of coercing others into obeying them, have devoted themselves to the worship of the only One Lord (Augustine, 2003, p.429).

The sacrament of confession and penance in Christianity, the story of creation and the fall of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden to the earth, and the opposition between the city of God, which is reserved exclusively for the righteous and faithful, and the terrestrial city of man, which is home to the sinful, are among the topics Augustine elaborates on in *The City of God*. The final sections of the book are devoted to depicting the final destination and abode of humankind.

Augustine began writing *The City of God* almost a century after Christianity had been officially endorsed by the Roman Empire. Christianity owed its spread within the Roman Empire to the efforts of Constantine the Great, who recognized Christianity as a sanctioned faith (Perry, 1377, p.145).

Constantine the Great gained control of the western part of the Roman Empire in 312 and by 324 had brought the entire empire under his control. Eighty years after Constantine's sanction, Christianity became the official faith of the Roman Empire. In the course of one century, the Christian community was transformed from a persecuted minority to a well-organized and flourishing community with a strong and official Church. Power brought new problems. An especially daring one was how the Church should adjust its role in relation to the political and temporal power- how Church and state should cooperate in governing the society. Not long after Christianity became the official religion, the Western Roman Empire fell to invading barbarians. This further complicated the Church's problems and

weakened its position as nonbelievers spread the notion that the Christian faith had caused the fall of the empire (O'Daly, 2004, p.17).

The opponents of Christianity imputed the fall of the empire to the new faith. And in his attempt to defend Christianity against such claims, Augustine broached the topic of justice. The opponents claimed that Christianity's promotion of such values and beliefs as monotheism, peace, and toleration had undermined the nationalism and aggressiveness that had formerly empowered the Romans. (It is worth noting that this idea has surfaced in recent history as Well. Edward Gibbon, for instance, remarked that the bishops of the Church were no less responsible for the fall of Rome than were the invading barbarians (Gibbon, 1351, p.485).) The spread of this anti-Christian idea gave rise to the doubt that the sanction of the Christian faith and its interference with the state had been to Rome's disadvantage.

Augustine on Justice

Responding to this doubt, Augustine wrote in *The City of God* that the weakening of the Roman Empire was not the fault of the newly established Christian faith. In making this point, he broached the topic of justice. According to Augustine, justice is realized when the relationship between God and humankind is sound. He believes that if people redress their relationship with God, obey His commands, and refrain from transgressing the established limits and from encroaching on the rights of others, justice will naturally be realized in human society. Therefore, in order to bring about justice, people must first rectify their selves and their relation with God, and only then will relationships among themselves be rectified in accordance with justice. In Book 19 of *The City of God*, Augustine defines justice as the virtue that grants every creature that which it deserves. He continues this discussion by asking whether true justice can cause man to be distanced from the true God and enthralled to the demons and devils.

As explained above, Plato held that the human soul incorporates three faculties and that justice on the individual level obtains when these faculties are in a state of equilibrium. Drawing on Christian doctrine, Augustine reduces these faculties to two. One is the inclination in the human existence that tends toward evil while the other tends toward good and virtue. This bifurcation is found in other divine faiths, including Islam, as well. (The Qur'an declares, "and [God] inspired [the soul] with discernment between its vices and virtues" (Qur'an 91:8).) Augustine explains that the virtuous inclination drives the human being toward the celestial city of God and the evil inclination strengthens his attachment to the earthly city of man. These two forces are in a perpetual state of conflict.

According to Augustine, the fall of the Roman Empire was not in any way related to Christian doctrine: That which solidifies the foundation of a society is justice. He argues that establishing the rule of justice among a people who are solely concerned with their self-interest is impracticable. It is true that Christianity had outwardly gained ground in the Empire, but faith had not yet penetrated the hearts of the masses or, to use the expression of the Qur'an, "faith has not yet entered into your hears" (Qur'an 49:14). Egoism and self-interest still persisted among the people. This drove the Roman Empire further away from justice, and the advance of Christianity was mainly a superficial phenomenon lacking a deep basis. Thus, true justice was unattainable, and a society cannot prosper without justice. Augustine was of the conviction that where states endorse idolatry and lack true faith, justice and stability cannot be established (Augustine, 2003, pp.2-881).

Refuting the claims of detractors, Augustine argues that the war fought to uproot injustice is not only sanctioned by Christian doctrine; it is deemed necessary. Due to this argument, Augustine is counted by some scholars among the founders of the theory of "just war" in the

field of international law. According to this view, Christianity's condemnation of war is not unconditional: Wars that are fought for a just cause and to uphold the truth are approved by Christian doctrine.

Another topic related to justice that Augustine reflects on is that empires are built on unjust bases. He is convinced that it is fundamentally impossible for empires to grow and develop out of just origins. Generally speaking, the formation of an empire involves war and plunder, and so it is only natural that innumerous rights should be trampled on and vast amounts of property plundered and usurped. Although these actions are at odds with justice, the victors are wont to euphemize such atrocities, justifying them as necessary means for establishing empires. It is only obvious that such dissimulations are incapable of altering the unjust nature of their actions. For, these same empire-builders undoubtedly denounce a person or a small band of people that take without permission the property of another as thieves and deserving of punishment.

To support his argument, Augustine relates a story from legend. At the time of Alexander, there lived a pirate who stole from small boats. When the pirate was finally apprehended, he was taken before Alexander, who excoriated him for his crime. But the pirate countered that his crime was incomparably insignificant when weighed against the crimes perpetrated by Alexander. The pirate explained that due to his humble means, the victims of his crime were no more than small boats, whereas Alexander, possessed of great resources and means, confiscated people's lands on a global scale and took thousands upon thousands of lives in his campaigns to further expand his empire. Alexander's crime was far greater, but he was hailed as the emperor while the poor man was denounced as a pirate (Augustine, 2003, p.139).

Thus, Augustine's emphasis that states and empires were built on the ruins of wars constituted one of the most important elements in his

political philosophy, and it helped in formulating his definition of justice in the social and political arenas (Foster, 1377, p.413).

The second part of *The City of God* represents Augustine's philosophical worldview on such topics as the cosmos, the human society, the world, and life after death. Augustine divides human society into the "heavenly community" and the "earthly community." Based on his account, life in this world takes shape in the conflict between the heavenly community (which is grounded on obedience to God's commands) and the earthly community (which is the demonic and evil community).

The "city of God," according to Augustine's description, is the city whose inhabitants lead their lives in accordance to the divine plan and law- or in other words, Christian doctrine. But on the other hand, the residents of the earthly community are utterly oblivious to Christian doctrine, squandering their lives in pursuing the carnal and un-Godly instincts, preoccupied with no concern other than satisfying their corporeal desires and indulging in the pleasures of the world, as though enjoying the bounties of this world was the sole purpose of their creation.

Augustine's worldview, which derives from Christian doctrine and the teachings of the monotheistic and Abrahamic faiths, presents the human being in this world as bearing a crucial obligation: he must determine his path to the eternal life; he can choose either the path of salvation or that of damnation. He must determine whether he desires to remain in the pristine heavenly community of eternal felicity or whether he wishes to relinquish this felicity and instead live a life of misery alongside the demons that only appear to be human. Should he choose the former, he ought to strive to fulfill its requirements: abiding by religious doctrine, practicing equity and justice in dealing with fellow human beings, and purging his soul of vice. If, however, he fails in avoiding vice, his heart would be unable to serve as a

receptacle for knowledge of God and as such he would be incapacitated from proceeding toward the heavenly community.

Augustine declares in *The City of God* that it is necessary that the residents of the city of God should polish and purify their souls by enduring the tribulations God decrees- just as gold is polished by abrasion. Living in the heavenly city of God requires purity of heart, and it would be unwarranted to expect to live with the saints and the pure souls without having purified one's soul. As such, the doomed inmates of hell are the residents of the earthly city who have failed to purify their souls and to establish a sound relationship with their Lord. And due to this failure, they are prevented from entering the city of God and enjoying the bounties of the heavenly city in an eternal life. Hence, according to Augustine, Christ's final purpose is to lead humankind to salvation and to prepare it for taking up residence in the heavenly community.

It is important to note that scholars who have studied *The City of God* affirm the influence of Plato's philosophy on Augustine's thought. That Augustine adhered to Manichaeism for a number of years has also given rise to the speculation that Manichaean doctrine played a role in the formation of his thought (O'Daly, 2006, pp.101-134). This speculation is further strengthened by the fact that Manichaean doctrine, like Augustine's, defines the human nature in terms of a duality between the forces of good and evil, and so, it is suggested, Augustine's postulation of a heavenly community versus an earthly one may have been inspired by Manichaeism. But, it should be pointed out, that the distinction between the transient life of the world and the eternal life of heaven and between the Godly forces and the devilish forces within the human nature is not an exclusive feature of Manichaeism; it is present in the doctrine of all monotheistic and Abrahamic faiths as well, including Islam, which is the final and most perfect faith ordained by God. Therefore, Augustine's teaching that

faith in God, righteous conduct, purification of the soul, and upholding justice are prerequisites for entering and residing in the city of God is rooted in the Bible. The city of God, as depicted by Augustine, is the city wherein vice and evil have no place and its residents are blessed by myriad divine bounties. This conception is expressed with very similar terminology in other faiths as well.

Augustine considers the internal conflict within the human being's soul and his perpetual struggle to repel and overcome Satan's temptations with the aim of gaining entry into the city of God as the fundamental essence of all religious and moral precepts. The importance of this internal conflict and struggle is confirmed by Islam as well. The Noble Prophet of Islam proclaimed this struggle to be more arduous and difficult than the external conflict in which one fights an apparent foe. This agrees with Augustine's phraseology in describing the temporary life of this world as being intertwined with evil.

In one of his poems inspired by a saying of the Prophet on the difference between human and animal life, Rumi, the renowned Muslim mystic and thinker, eloquently conveys the disparate modes of human life. The saying from which Rumi draws inspiration sets down the common doctrine of all monotheistic faiths regarding the life of the human being in this world and his destiny in the hereafter (or the city of God, according to Augustinian phraseology). Based on this saying of the Prophet,[8] the human nature is composed of reason, on the one hand, and the carnal impulses, on the other. Thus, humankind is distinguished from the angels, who are pure intellect, and from the animals, who partake only of carnal impulses. Now, among humankind, those whose intellects have subdued their carnal impulses attain to a level higher than that of the angles but those whose intellects succumb to their carnal impulses fall (to use the expression of the Qur'an[9]) to a level inferior to that of animals.

Rumi eloquently expands on this saying from the Prophet in the following poem:

> In a saying was described how the Munificent God
>
>> Created in this world creatures of three groups.
>>
>> One group [He created] entirely of reason and knowledge and munificence;
>>
>> That is the angel who knows not save worship.
>>
>> In its nature there is no greed or desire:
>>
>> Pure light, alive with the love of God.
>>
>> Another group [He created] devoid of knowledge;
>>
>> That is the animal, fat from fodder.
>>
>> He sees not but the stable and the fodder,
>>
>> Oblivious to misery and nobility.

Rumi then goes on to consider the human being, whose nature encompasses the animal and the angelic and is constantly beleaguered by the necessity to choose between one of these two tendencies- a point that Augustine, inspired by Christian doctrine, expresses in similar terms.

>> Those two groups [angels and animals] are free from war and combat,
>>
>> While this human being- with the two adversaries in him- is in torment (Rumi, 1315, p.240)

The idea Rumi has put into poetry Augustine in his *City of God* identifies as the end, the ultimate purpose. Furthermore, Rumi's classification of humankind into three groups in their choice of the way of life they take is comparable to Augustine's doctrine.

>> Humankind was divided on account of the test;
>>
>> In form they are all human, but of three nations are they.
>>
>> One group is submerged entirely in love;
>>
>> Like Jesus: they are ranked with the angels.
>>
>> The form is that of Adam, but the essence is of Gabriel:

Liberated from anger, desire and dispute.

Freed from [spiritual] toil and from asceticism and struggle,

As though of a human they were born not.

Another group is ranked with the ass:

Anger and desire unrestrained they have become.

The quality of Gabriel they too had but it departed;

The house was too narrow so that quality left. …

Necessarily the lowest of the low is he [the beastly man];

Shun him- "I love not those who vanish."[10] …

There remains another group who are at war:

Half animal, half [spiritually] alive, aided by guidance.

Day and night in war and conflict,

One half fighting the other half (Rumi, 1315, p.241)

Another question that requires our attention is whether Augustine defers the realization of the city of God and its rule of justice to the hereafter or whether he acknowledges that it could be accomplished in this world, albeit as a weaker manifestation of that eternal city of God? Opinions differ on this question. Augustine's commentators and the proponents of the power of Church and its detractors offer diverging views. The detractors of the power of Church in the West insist that the heavenly city Augustine characterizes can exist only in the hereafter and following the Resurrection. In contrast, however, the proponents of the power of Church, invoking Augustine's interpretation, hold the Church to be superior to the state, arguing that the Church represents the city of God on the earth. As such, it is the responsibility of the Church to prepare humankind for entering the city of God. Humankind can attain felicity only if it submits to Church doctrine, rectifies its relationship with God, and upholds justice in regulating social and individual interactions ('Ināyat, 1377, p.135).

In subsequent centuries, however, the Church was beleaguered by numerous problems. Corruption and abuse of power undermined the credibility of the Church as an institution that could prepare humankind for the eternal life.[11] But in spite of these problems and the diminished credibility of the Church, Augustine's doctrine- which expresses the necessity of justice and spiritual purity for the wellbeing of humankind in this world and its felicity in the hereafter- remains unaffected, for it conforms to the essential spirit of all monotheistic faiths.

The Basis of Justice

Augustine points to two factors as constituting the basis of justice- both of which are treated by Islamic doctrine as well. These two factors are the equilibrium of the faculties of the human soul and the application of reason. By applying reason correctly, the human being can succeed in setting right his relationship with God and with fellow human beings. The same point of view is evident in the advices Ghazālī (d. 505 AH/1111 AD) offers in his *Naṣīhah al-mulūk*- inspired by Islamic doctrine- to kings and sultans as regards the importance of upholding justice and renouncing oppression. He writes,

> He can uphold justice who maintains justice within himself. Justice is to prevent transgression, lust, and anger from assailing reason so that the former would succumb to reason and religion rather than enthralling it. The majority of humankind employ reason in the service of lust and anger in order to devise stratagems so as to satisfy the latter two, not realizing that reason is from the same substance as the angels and is the army of God whereas lust and anger are of the army of Satan. How can one who subjugates the army of God to that of Satan exercise justice in relation to others? Thus, the sun of justice must first dawn in their own hearts, whereon its light would shine on their household and

thereafter on their courtiers and commanders and only then on their vassals (Ghazālī, 1361, p.37)

Drawing on Islamic doctrine, Ghazālī considers the application of reason as the second factor conducive to establishing the rule of justice- a point Augustine also acknowledges, based on his understanding of Christian doctrine.

It is reported that Imām Ṣādiq[12] was asked about the nature of the intellect. He answered, "The intellect is that by which the All-Merciful is worshipped and [admission to] heaven is acquired" (Kulaynī, 1388, p.8). This report clearly demonstrates that the intellect is the means by which the human being can worship God legitimately and thereby secure his felicity. In this relation, Ghazālī writes:

> Exercising justice and acknowledging that the world is a temporary station result from the perfection of the intellect. The perfection of the intellect is that it should descry actions as they truly are, perceive their esoteric truth, and avoid being deceived by their appearance. For instance, if he [the king] decides to quit justice, he must realize that the appearance of the world should not beguile him, for what is the worldly purpose that compels his to quit justice? If it is to eat pleasant foods, then he should know that he is an animal in the form of man. And if it is to wear elegant clothing, then he must know that he is a woman in the form of a man, for concern for one's attractiveness is the characteristic of women. And if it is to inflict his wrath on his enemies, then he must know that he is a beast of prey in the form of man, for giving free rein to wrath is the characteristic of beasts of prey. And if it is to recruit people into his service, then he must know that he is a fool in the form of an intelligent man, for if he were intelligent he would know that the courtiers are all slaves of their own

bellies, loins, and desires, and that he is to them only the means of gratifying their desires (Ghazālī, 1361, p.37)

Ghazālī continues to explain that the only way out of this wretched state is to apply reason. Those who are in positions of power in the social and political spheres must abide by the judgments of reason, for it is in this way that they can secure their salvation and the salvation of others and ensure that the rights of every creature are respected.

Conclusion

Having conducted this very brief analysis- as a prelude to a more thorough investigation- we may acknowledge that the concept of justice and the various spheres of its application constitute a worthy topic for a comparative study between Islamic and Christian doctrine. In this comparative study, the thought and works of Augustine would provide a rich source of investigation due to his status as a brilliant and well-respected expositor of Christian doctrine. It is, however, important to bear a few points in mind in studying Augustine's exposition of Christian doctrine as regards justice.

(1) Augustine treats of justice and the factors related thereto in the framework of a religious worldview and cosmology that are grounded on the Bible. Augustinian justice, like Platonic justice, emphasizes the necessity of abiding by the law and observing the legitimate rights of every creature. There is, however, one significant difference between the two interpretations of justice. From Plato's point of view, the individual is in no way affiliated to a universal society of some sort. For Plato, the most authoritative law is that of the state of which the individual is a citizen. Augustine, in contrast, portrays the human being as a member of an eternal community. The jurisdiction of the law of this eternal community is universal, and so irrespective of where they are from, people are duty-bound to respect this law.

This distinction has led some scholars of political thought to state that for Plato's "citizen," justice is a relative concept. That is, every state, according to Plato, has its own peculiar justice, being confined to that particular state's geographical and historical boundaries. As such, the regulations enacted by each state are binding solely on the citizens of that state. And it is a matter of fact that such regulations are susceptible to change: That is, they may be altered or disposed of altogether. That is contrary to the Augustinian perspective. The law that reflects justice as defined by Augustine is unalterable; its statutes bear eternal authority for all humankind, regardless of the societies and states that separate them (O'Daly, 2004, p.59; see also Foster, 1377, p.416).

(2) Augustine's consideration of justice and injustice, especially as they relate to the actions of rulers and governments, hinges primarily on his division of human society into two camps- the city of God versus the earthly city. Augustine's elucidation of the city of God, the spiritual realm, the hereafter, and the eternal life of felicity that is granted to the inhabitants of the city of God- the community of the righteous- derives from the Bible (*Kitāb Muqaddas*, 2002, pp.896-897). Furthermore, that this world is a temporary station and not a permanent abode is a common belief of all monotheistic and Abrahamic faiths, as evidenced by the abundant treatment this topic receives in Islamic doctrine as expressed in the words of the Prophet and Imām 'Alī. There is no legitimate justification that an adherent of Islamic or Christian doctrine can resort to in an attempt to legitimize injustice and oppression. For, the true believer- who believes in God and a day of reckoning, who acknowledges that this world is a temporary station he will have to leave, who anticipates life after death and Resurrection as the juncture whereat the righteous and faithful will be separated from the unrighteous and unfaithful, and, finally, who establishes his relation to God, fellow human beings, and other creatures based on these beliefs- cannot tolerate injustice. It is in

this light that Augustine, in *The City of God*, elaborates at such length on the necessity of a sound relation between God and humankind: The human being must rectify his relationship with God if he wishes to see the rule of justice in this world.

Islam confirms this fundamental principle, acknowledging it to be the practical guarantee that can ensure the implementation of religious law. That is why the instructions of the Qur'an are aimed at satisfying the believer's heart as to the veracity of religion, not merely at eliciting a superficial and reluctant obedience. Thus, it would be wrong to expect that justice should be upheld in a society whose members- as Augustine puts it- lack the true faith that is rooted in the heart. This is true of the sphere of politics as well: The rulers that are deceived by their power, wealth, or position cannot possess the motivation for upholding justice.

Since the topic of justice is one that has been of great interest to the adherents of the monotheistic faiths and has spurred many a serious debate among them- this being especially true of Islam and Christianity, which have the greatest number of followers worldwide- and as Muslim and Christian scholars have historically been engaged with it, a comparative study of the position of each of these two faiths and their scholars regarding this topic can possibly lead to great results in bringing to light the shared principles of these two Abrahamic faiths. The importance of this undertaking finds lucid expression in the Qur'an, which in Sūrah Āl 'Imrān (verse 64) commands the Prophet to invite the adherents of the monotheistic faiths ("the people of the book") to unite around the fundamental principle they share- namely, the oneness of God. The present article is no more than an introduction to a study of the profound concept of justice as reflected through the prism of Islam and Christianity. A thorough comparative study requires a more comprehensive examination.

Notes

1. Translation: " *'adala fulānan* means to be of the same weight [importance, significance] as someone else … *'adala qāẓī 'adlan* means that the judge was fair in his judgment."

2. The twelve infallible religious authorities the Shia recognize as the legitimate successors of the Prophet.

3. The Master of the Faithful: An honorific epithet reserved in Shia literature exclusively for Imām 'Alī, the first of the Imāms and the immediate successor of the Prophet according to Shia doctrine.

4. Khwājah Naṣīr al-dīn Ṭūsī Writes: In the science of psychology it is established that the human soul possesses three distinct faculties, through which it exercises, with the aid of justice, its agency in performing various actions and producing various effects. … One is the rational soul, which is called the "angelic spirit," … the second is the faculty of anger, which is called the "predatory spirit," … and the third is the faculty of libido, which is called the "brute spirit." (Ṭūsī, 1373, p.108)

5. *Husn zāhir*: General respectability in the society consequent on one's avoidance of the major and minor sins and of what the public considers improper.

6. A number of scholars, though agreeing with the general definition of justice as "placing a thing where it belongs," maintain that it takes on a more specific meaning in different contexts. In the context of jurisprudence, for instance, when the Arabic term *'Ádil* (the nomen agentis deriving from *'adl*) is used to describe the witness in a court and also the leader of a congregational prayer, it contrasts with *fāsiq* (unrighteous, sinful, wayward). But when it is used to describe rulers and judges, it contrasts with *zālim* (oppressor) and *jā'ir* (transgressor). In the science of *hadāth*, *'Ádil* is contrasted with *kādhib* (lier) and *ghayr-amān* (untrustworthy). In practical philosophy and classical political science *'adl* is used to indicate the middle position between *ifrāt* and *tafrit* (two opposite extremes) (see Humā'ī, p.18).

7. We should, of course, bear in mind that Augustine's understanding of Christian Scripture was in large part Shaped by Neo-Platonic thought, which held great sway over the intellectual milieu of Medieval Europe (see Bumer, p.75).

8. The reported saying by the Prophet reads, "Verily God- exalted is He-created the angels and impressed on them reason. He created the beasts and impressed on them desire. He created the children of Adam and impressed on them reason and desire. Thus, he whose reason prevails over his desire is more elevated than the angels and he whose desire prevails over his reason is more inferior than the beasts" ('Āmilī, 1403, p.164).

9. This is an allusion to verse 7, Sūrah A'rāf: "Certainly We have created for hell many of the jinn and the humankind: They have hearts with which they do not understand; they have eyes with which they do not see; they have ears with which they do not hear. They are like cattle; rather, they are more ignorant. It is they who are the heedless."

10. An allusion to this Qur'anic verse: "When night arched over [Abraham] he saw a star and [intent on guiding the pagans] said, 'This is my lord.' But when it set, he said, 'I love not those who vanish'" (Qur'an 6:76).
11. Ultimately, the Reformation in Europe challenged the Church hierarchy for its corruption and its interpretations of Christian doctrine, and this resulted in a great schism within Christendom.
12. Imām Ṣādiq is the sixth Imām (leader) in the successive line of the infallible Shiite authorities that starts with Imām 'Alī and ends with Mahdī, the promised savior who was born about twelve centuries ago and has since the age of five lived in occultation.

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